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ABSTRACT

In spite of the many teacher evaluation models available and the extensive research on performance appraisal, few community colleges have effectively come to terms with this difficult task. Many administrators prefer to avoid the interpersonal conflict and the possible legal ramifications of performance appraisal. However, in times of limited resources, institutions must seek to make better use of their human resources. Performance appraisal should incorporate both performance enhancement (formative evaluation) and performance management (summative evaluation). Most administrators and supervisors prefer performance enhancement, which involves reinforcing effective behavior, and avoid performance management, which involves identifying unacceptable behaviors among faculty and negotiating change. A supervisor will need highly developed communication skills and training to successfully combine judging and counseling in the same appraisal process. Exhibiting a positive and constructive attitude and effective listening skills, possessing adequate knowledge of the employee's job functions, giving reflective feedback, asking open-ended questions, and engaging in joint goal-setting, will assist the supervisor in negotiating appropriate employee behavior during the appraisal interview. Johnson County Community College in Overland Park, Kansas, utilizes an appraisal process combining student feedback, classroom observation, and faculty self-evaluation. Faculty complete a goal-setting initiative, participate in an individual appraisal conference which combines formative and summative evaluations, and receive follow-up coaching. The process begins and ends with review of the job description. (PAA)

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COMMUNICATING WITH FACULTY USING A DIAGNOSTIC PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS

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COMMUNICATING WITH FACULTY USING A DIAGNOSTIC PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL PROCESS

This article attempts to establish a context for a discussion of the performance appraisal process as practiced at Johnson County Community College. The article does not describe the components of that process in detail. That description and discussion will occur at the International Conference For Community College Chairs and Deans in February. Rather, the article contends that performance appraisal in community colleges of necessity consists of both performance enhancement and performance management in spite of the fact that the research overwhelmingly counsels against such multiplicity of purpose. The article further contends that effective communications techniques and skills are essential to the successful implementation of performance appraisal under these conditions. Finally, the article briefly outlines the performance appraisal process at Johnson County Community College, explains how that process accommodates the multiplicity of purposes, and serves as a prelude to a more thorough discussion and dialogue at the conference.

In spite of the many evaluation models and the extensive research that has been done on performance appraisal, few community colleges have come to satisfactory terms with this extremely difficult task. Burkhalter and Buford suggested that performance appraisal was one of the weakest elements in the management process. After a survey of 2,400 practicing managers and an analysis of 25 years of research and

observation they suggested that "no industry or academician has comprehensively solved the problems in performance appraisal."[1] Regarding community colleges, Gilley concluded that "few, if any, evaluation plans have been developed which relate to student learning, or that serve to improve instruction, or that have been satisfactory to the faculty, or that have been widely accepted by administrators."[2] Meadows concluded that "performance appraisal systems have yielded disappointing results within the community college environment...."[3]

Community college administrators, faced with the task of evaluating thousands of faculty each year, may find these conclusions somewhat unnerving. Indeed, Kikorski and Litterer claim that some supervisors "avoid this crucial task (performance appraisal), while others experience anxiety and discomfort doing it."[4] Even though many administrators are uncomfortable evaluating, the process has not become less important in recent years. If anything, it has become more important and vital to institutions in these times of accountability, emphasis on assessment, and the urge to do more with less. One way for institutions to become more effective is for them to make better use of their chief resource--their human potential. "According to virtually every authority on the subject, from university researchers to organizational employees, the performance appraisal is considered the primary context for supervisors and employees to work together to achieve superior performance."[5] In his study of Illinois community colleges, Gibson discovered that

both faculty and academic administrators favored "periodic formal evaluation."[6] Boggs also concluded that the majority of faculty favor formal evaluation, but he offered the opinion that "the lack of a systematic evaluation procedure is often the result of administrative reticence."[7] Given the fact that administrators are often not trained as evaluators,[8] the increased legislation regulating the process, the presence of faculty unions, the tendency to encourage litigation as a viable solution to management problems, and the multiple purposes of the process, it is not surprising to find that community college administrators are hesitant to pursue performance appraisal. However, much of this anxiety occurs when the evaluation requires both performance management and performance enhancement, for anxiety over evaluation surfaces most frequently when the process is summative rather than formative.

When judgement rather than counseling is called for, administrators often find the process uncomfortable. "They often dislike the face-to-face encounter and feel unskilled in performing the vital appraisal interview into which all prior efforts flow."[9] Visions of court appearances and doubts about top-level administrative support can create justified anxiety in the front-line supervisor. As a result of the difference between performance enhancement and performance management, "many educators and researchers voice the concern that one appraisal system cannot be both formative and summative."[10] If given the option of evaluation as summative or formative, administrators would rather exercise performance enhancement

than performance management. Everyone appreciates attempts to reinforce effective performance and to give praise and encouragement. However, as supervisors, community college administrators are often called upon to exercise performance management, i.e. to identify unacceptable behavior and negotiate change. Peter Seldin points out that "in an ideal world, faculty evaluations would be conducted separately for the purposes of improving teaching (formative) and making personnel decisions (summative), since one may have great impact on the other."[11] The problem is that we have to deal with the real world not the ideal world--a world where institutions can not afford to conduct two separate processes for the collection of data and the sharing of developmental strategies. For the most part administrators are required to implement effectively an evaluation process that promotes improved performance, but also serves to prevent unacceptable practices. It is no surprise that most administrators attempt to focus on the developmental issue and not deal with the potential conflict and possible legal ramifications of exercising disciplinary judgement. However, community college administrators seldom enjoy the luxury of purely formative evaluation because, as Hobson and Gibson point out: "Systems for the appraisal of job performance are generally designed to accomplish two major purposes: organizational control and individual development."[12]

Successfully implementing an effective performance appraisal process, especially one that requires both performance enhancement and performance management, centers on

communications. The supervisor will need highly developed communications skills and training to be successful at combining judging and counseling in the same appraisal process. This situation often requires the supervisor to communicate differently depending on whether he/she is wearing the hat of performance enhancement or performance management. If the appraisal relationship between the supervisor and employee is a continuous one, the supervisor should be able to determine when the process can culminate in a reinforcement of effective behavior or must involve the prohibition of unacceptable behavior. While the administrator may be uncomfortable dealing with negative behaviors, the appraisal process always contains the potential for disciplinary action and this can not be changed by turning a blind eye toward behavior that violates organizational norms. Success in identifying improper behavior and negotiating improved performance can be enhanced if the supervisor demonstrates effective communications skills in the process. While we have progressed from traditional practices that attempted to offer subjective judgements about personality traits as the essence of evaluation to a more objective process that utilizes field interviews, forced-choice questionnaires, and listings of critical incidents, none of these instruments and methodologies will make a significant impact if the results are not communicated to the employee in an effective manner. No matter how good the instruments; no matter how objective and job related the data; communications is the point at which the process succeeds or fails. Performance appraisal needs to

be a continuing communications process engaged in by the supervisor and the employee, a process that eventually culminates in the performance appraisal interview. "Continuous appraisal is a simple pattern of behavior that distinguishes the most effective managers."[13] Periodically, this continuous relationship results in the performance review or interview. Meadows goes so far as to claim that the "success of performance appraisal depends largely on the appraisal interview."[14] If the performance appraisal relationship has been positive, the review can be a congenial session in which the supervisor reinforces behavior, convinces the employee of the efficacy of the evaluative judgements, and negotiates future behavior. With the current emphasis on a collaborative approach to supervisor/employee relations, enhanced communications as part of the appraisal process becomes even more crucial. In a collaborative appraisal process the "emphasis is on communication, matching expectations between supervisor and subordinate, and goal-setting.[15] It is very important to the appraisal process that the supervisor set specific and realistic expectations for future employee behavior. With clarity of purpose and specific requirements, the supervisor can coach enhanced performance and motivate the employee to identify his/her goals with the organization's goals. Encouraging employee participation in the actual appraisal interview, exhibiting a positive and constructive attitude, possessing adequate knowledge of the employee's job functions, and engaging in joint goal-setting will assist the supervisor in negotiating

appropriate behavior with the employee.[16] No appraisal system can be truly effective if it does not result from an open and honest relationship between supervisor and employee. If this relationship has been nurtured during the appraisal process, the interview will be characterized by effective communications. The problem is that the possibility for such a relationship is often dependent on the organizational climate. "Failure to conduct effective interviews is often the result of an ineffective organizational appraisal system and a lack of knowledge and skills training among managers." [17] Obviously, in institutions where openness and trust are promoted as institutional values, the administrator is better able to engage faculty in sincere attempts to improve performance.

The supervisor has the primary responsibility to promote effective communications in the appraisal review. The supervisor must exhibit effective listening skills, must be trained to give reflective feedback, and to ask open-ended questions. These skills are required to overcome the aspects of the process that tend to prevent open communications; namely, the hierarchical nature of the event, the judgmental character of the review process, and the fact that the process often has multiple purposes. The presence of non-verbal cues and the organizational climate can also influence the quality of dialogue that takes place. Because of the hierarchical nature of the interview, if the appraiser does not possess listening skills the participants will revert to ritualistic and formalized forms of communication. The supervisor needs

to be friendly, sensitive and non-judgmental to encourage employee participation, since research demonstrates that employees who participate in the process feel more positive about the appraisal. If the supervisor clearly communicates the goals and purposes of the process, provides feedback clarification, non-evaluative listening, and the appropriate balance of praise and criticism, he/she will mitigate the negative aspects of the evaluative nature of the process.[19] Goodall, Wilson and Waagen identify the essential characteristics of the ideal appraiser as a)credibility, b)consistency, and c)active listening.[19] The more the supervisor knows and understands the employee's job, the higher his/her credibility. This suggests the importance of a job analysis as part of the appraisal process. Such an analysis also helps to restrict the appraisal to job related tasks and gives the process more credibility. Consistency relates to supervisor style. The employee feels more confidence in the fairness of the process if he understands where the supervisor is coming from throughout the process. Active listening encourages employee participation and thus investment in the process. With these qualities the appraiser will be more successful in convincing the employee of the fairness of the performance appraisal process while at the same time negotiating future behavior consistent with organizational values. If the supervisor has built a working relationship with the employee, if he/she knows what is required and what he/she expects of the employee and can communicate this effectively, if the appraisal process

involves a dialogue that is both cognitive and emotional, meaning that the supervisor demonstrates an awareness of what the employee is thinking and feeling, then the prospects for a satisfactory outcome are enhanced. Kikorski and Litterer further point out that "the specific, structured, and learnable microtraining skills of attending, feedback, paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, open and closed questions, and focusing can make the manager more effective at the neglected and crucial interview point in the process where the appraisal itself is delivered and discussed."[20]

Reflective of this importance of communications in the appraisal review and interview process, Johnson County Community College has implemented the appraisal process graphically illustrated in the attached flow chart. This process begins with the job description and/or analysis for the purpose of defining job-related criteria. Based on these criteria, data are collected using the Student IDEA form which provides quantifiable and nationally normed data of an evaluative and diagnostic nature. Classroom observation and administrative input provide further data. The process includes self-evaluation, allowing the faculty member to complete the data collection by including any data he/she considers pertinent to the process. During this phase the faculty member is encouraged to complete with the program director a joint goal-setting initiative called the Individual Development Plan. As the loop in the flow chart suggests, a performance appraisal conference for discussion of issues involved in both performance enhancement and performance

management is scheduled. This conference is followed by performance planning and coaching. The process ends where it began - with the job description. Thus the cycle repeats itself. The key to the process resides in the loop where the communications skills of the administrator bring together the aspects of the appraisal data, the reinforcement of behavior, the setting of expectations, and the negotiating of future behavior. Effective communications creates an atmosphere conducive to individual development and at the same time promotes conformity to appropriate organizational values and behaviors. While this process focuses on the development of the faculty member, there is a recognition of the possibility of disciplinary action. The system provides a "progressive counseling procedure" in case behavior fails to meet institutional norms. This procedure provides progressive assistance to the faculty member to encourage behavior modification, but also specifies actions to be taken if unacceptable behavior persists. Thus, termination becomes a possibility, but this possibility is minimized because of specific interventions on the part of the college to assist the faculty member. The performance appraisal process at Johnson County Community College encourages performance enhancement, but also accommodates performance management.

Notes

[1]Bettye B. Burkhalter, "Performance Appraisal: An Overview," quoted in Performance Appraisal: Concepts and Techniques for Postsecondary Education, (Washington, D.C.: AACJC, n.d.), p.1.

[2]J. Wade Gilley, "Personnel Performance Evaluation," in Accountability in the Community College: Proceedings of the Second Annual International Summer Institute, (Los Angeles: ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior College Information, April, 1972), Microfiche, ED 060-842, p. 82.

[3]Mark E. Meadows, "Communication Factors in Appraisal," quoted in Performance Appraisal: Concepts and Techniques for Postsecondary Education, (Washington, D.C.: AACJC, n.d.), p. 57.

[4]John F. Kikorski and Joseph A. Litterer, "Effective Communication in the Performance Appraisal Review," Public Personnel Management Journal, vol. 12 (1983), p.33.

[5]H.Lloyd Goodal, Jr., Gerald L. Wilson, and Christopher L. Waagen, "The Performance Appraisal Interview: An Interpretive Assessment," Quarterly Journal of Speech, vol. 72 (February, 1986), p. 74.

[6]Kenneth R. Gibson, The Practice of Faculty Evaluation: Perceptions of Full-Time Teaching Faculty and Academic Administrators in Illinois Public Community Colleges, unpublished dissertation, Southern Illinois University, 1977, p. 61.

[7]George R. Boggs, "Faculty Evaluation," Community College Review, vol. 11, no.2 (Fall, 1983), p. 34.

[8]Boggs, p. 38.

[9]Kikorski and Litterer, op. cit., p.34.

[10]Burkhalter, op. cit., p. 2.

[11]Peter Seldin, Changing Practices in Faculty Evaluation, (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1984), p. 128.

[12]C.J. Hobson and F.W. Gibson, "Capturing Supervisor Rating Policies: A Way to Improve Performance Appraisal Effectiveness," Personnel Administrator, vol. 29, no. 3 (1984), p. 59.

[13]E. Yager, "A Critique of Performance Appraisal Systems," Personnel Journal, vol. 60, no.2 (1981), p. 130.

[14]Meadows, **op. cit.**, p. 58.

[15]Robert L. Taylor and Robert A. Zawacki, "Trends in Performance Appraisal: Guidelines for Managers," Personnel Administrator, vol. 29, no. 3, (1984), p. 71.

[16]Baker and Morgan, **op. cit.**, p.76.

[17]**Ibid.**, p. 78.

[18]Meadows, **op. cit.**, p. 63.

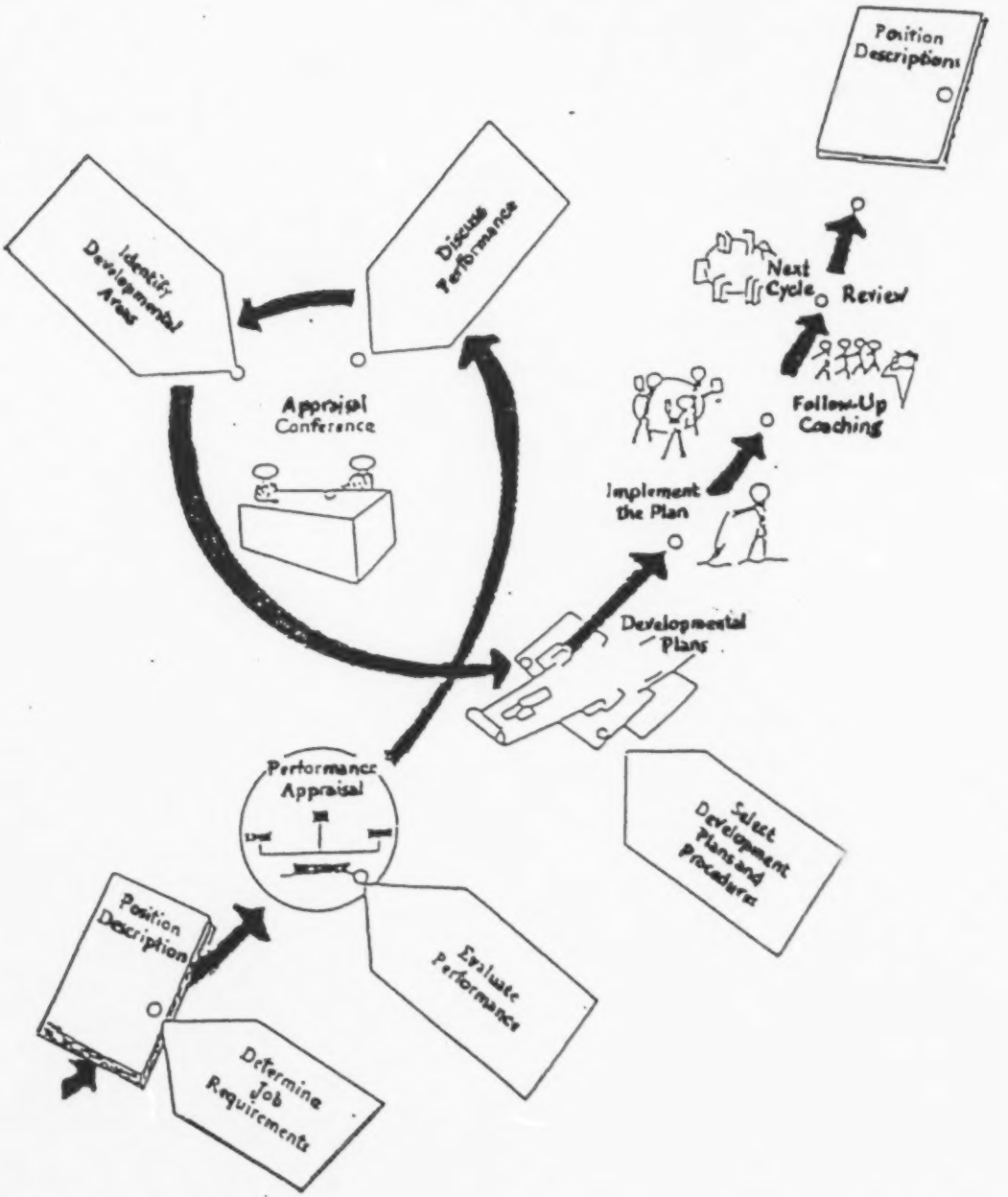
[19]Goodall, Wilson, and Waagen, **op. cit.**, p. 75.

[20]Kikorski and Litterer, **op. cit.**, 41.

APPENDIX A

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL FLOW CHART



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